

# Outstanding Features of Thai Games

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## INTRODUCTION

It is a widely accepted fact that games are very important to the development of physical, emotional, social, spiritual and conceptual well-being in children. Games are like a laboratory because children can experiment with knowledge of their social environment in a unrestricted and fun way. As Piaget said, activities like games completely help children to be a part of their world environment.

Studying folk games can help us understand the culture of the local area from which they come because folk games demonstrate the characteristics and the behaviour of the people of the local area and give us a glimpse into their understanding of their problems. They help us, the researchers and observers, see the situation of that society and the lives of the people in that society. In

a similar manner, these same games help children learn about their own society and adjust themselves to their social environment.

Folk games also demonstrate the relationship between rural people and the natural environment because in many games children borrow their playing equipment from nature in the form of seeds, bamboo, etc., to use as the props in their games. In other types of games, children play in imitation of animals like elephants or crocodiles that can be found in their region. In this way, games show the local characteristics of the regional cultures that constitute the parts of the whole Thai national culture. If each regional area can preserve their own individual characteristics, the characteristics of Thai national games as a whole will be preserved. Regional games are integral to the national identity of Thai games.

## OUTSTANDING FEATURES OF THAI GAMES

Most games in each part of Thailand have special features which can be summed up as follows:

1) Thai games are divided into games with rules and those without. If the games have rules, these games are uncomplicated and easy to play. Games that have no rules are based on skills like pantomime, imitation, and imagination.

2) Thai games usually require a large number of players. This shows children how people get along together in the society, and children learn how games can be adjusted to various group sizes.

3) In some Thai games, players must provide their own rules and equipment. These games help children learn how to work in groups with other people and help promote a democratic system. These games also help children develop their creative thinking.

4) Most games with rules have remained unchanged for more than 200 years and some games have been played the same way by generations of children for more than 750 years.

5) Most games don't need a lot of equipment; if they do, the equipment will come from nature and be easy to find. This makes children from all economic backgrounds equal in status for the games that they play. For example, tamarind seeds are popular equipment for many jacks and marbles-type

games. Bamboo, grass, and coconuts as well as many other natural products are used as well.

6) Some children's games change according to the season in Thailand, so the equipment will also change according to the season. Tamarind seed games, for example, take place in the winter during the tamarind season. Coconut and cashew nut games, however, are available to children all year long.

7) Some games rely on singing and conversation that tells stories about the children's lives in relation to their society and the natural world around them. One popular game teaches children about the different hair styles of children in Thailand and the meanings and importance of these hairstyles. Another rhyming game teaches children about bathing etiquette in the canals and rivers or about the common Thai practice of having adult men join a monastery for a period of time to make merit for themselves and their mothers. These games also help children experiment with language and progress in their language learning.

8) In some games, adults and children can play together because they don't rely on physical skills. Name games, for example, help establish relationships between adults and children, help children learn the names and uses of things around them, and help them learn through a gradual scaffolding of

knowledge. Another example of this type of game is "Fish Trap" which is described in detail in the Appendix.

9) Most Thai games provide children with exercise and help them increase their mental and physical agility. They help with coordination. Even in imitation-style games, children must learn to be reasonably accurate in their portrayals. This helps them to fine tune their self awareness of their bodies. Games also help develop teamwork among players and decision making skills for individuals.

10) Each game has special characteristics of the region that it comes from. From province to province, and town to town, within a region games are played in a similar manner, but from region to region the games may differ substantially from each other. The game

"Crocodile", for instance, which teaches children about life and perils along the river, is only played by children who live near rivers where crocodiles are present.

11) Some games, however, follow the same general rules from region to region throughout the country. "The Tiger in the Basket" is one example and "Hopscotch" is another.

12) Games that have been played since the Sukhothai period in Thai history, 700 years ago, are remarkably similar to game from other countries even though there was no international contact at that time. "Hopscotch" and ropeskiing type games are as popular in Thailand as they are in other countries. "Rock-Paper-Scissors" is another such example.

## CONCLUSION

From my experience teaching and studying folk games, I have learned that Thai national games have almost the same characteristics as games from other countries. Players of games in Thailand and throughout the world must sing and talk to practice language, develop coordination and/or increase strength and stamina, use imagination to create scenes for their games, solve problems individually and as a group, and imitate and learn to understand the world around them. All of these aspects are crucial in the development of children.

Nowadays, however, Thai children play their native folk games with less frequency and are instead turning to the instant and easy eye-catching gratification of video games. These games are limited in their benefits though. While it's true that children playing video games develop some hand or rather finger-eye coordination and problem solving, the games don't help children develop overall coordination, physical well-being or any of the social or intellectual benefits of traditional games. The situation has arisen, I think, because Thailand has embraced foreign culture

without consideration and discrimination. These video games are now easy to buy and children can be seen playing them everywhere--during their lunch breaks, on the bus or on the backs of motorcycles, in shophouses, etc. Children don't have to go into the jungle to find a

perfect piece of wood for their game or spend time looking for bamboo any longer, they only have to turn on their video game. In our rapid advance towards modernization, Thai people are in danger of forgetting their native folk games and losing the benefits that go with them.

## APPENDIX

### Fish Trap

- ❑ **Players** : unlimited
- ❑ **Equipment** : one large piece of cloth, enough sticks for every player, with one stick shorter than all the others
- ❑ **Formation** : Players make a large circle and hold hands and the "fish" stands in the center
- ❑ **How to Play** : First, players choose sticks. The player with the short stick is the "fish" and stays in the circle. Next, cover the eyes of the "fish" with the cloth and spin him or her three times. The rest of the players now begin walking clockwise together around the "fish", singing :

"Fish Trap, Fish Trap

The fish is caught in the fish trap.

Only a blind fish

can get itself caught in a fish trap".

The players sing the song three times, and when it's finished, the group asks, "Is it a dead fish or a live fish?" If the "fish" answers "alive" everybody in the circle can change positions. If the "fish" answers "dead", the other players have to stand still. Finally, the fish has to guess the name of one of the players by touching one of the players while still blindfolded. If the name that the "fish" guesses is correct, that player come into the circle as the new "fish". If the name is wrong, the old "fish" remains the "fish" for another round.

### REE-REE RICE

- ❑ **Players** : unlimited
- ❑ **Equipment** : sticks for all players
- ❑ **Formation** : Chose two players to stand in the middle using the method illustrated in "Fish Trap". These two people stand facing each other and holding their hands together over their heads forming an arch. The rest of the players form a single file line and hold the shoulders of the person in front of them.
- ❑ **How to play** : Next, the players in the line begin weaving through the arch in a figure eight formation, passing through the arch twice for every figure eight while all of the players sing :  
"Ree Ree Rice, Ree Ree Rice,  
Two cups of fresh rice.  
Go under the house  
To find some coins.  
Put the rice on a plate  
and catch... the last ones in line!"

When the singers gets to the end of the song, the arch makers bring down their arms and capture the players within. Two of these players become the new arch makers

### RIDING THE BIJFALO INTO WAR

- ❑ **Players** : unlimited amount, formed into two teams
- ❑ **Equipmer.t** : A large cloth for each pair of playe~s from each team (each team should have a different color and wear the cloth as a headband) ; a whistle
- ❑ **Formation** : Form a big square with a size appropriate for the group size. Teams stay on opposite sides of the square and players spread out around their team's area.
- ❑ **How to play** : Divide the group into equal teams. Within the teams players get into pairs with the larger player being on the bottom as the buffalo and the other person as the rider. The riders wear the cloth bands around their head's, identifying their teams. When the game leader blows the whistle, the teams rush towards each other for a predetermined amount of time and the riders try to take the headbands from the buffalo riders of the other team. When the whistle blows again, the team with the most headbands wins. Players can then switch buffalo and riders and try again.

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